

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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TIOGA REAP ZONE MARKS THIRD ANNIVERSARY

OWEGO - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today joined local officials and representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development office in a press conference to commemorate the third anniversary of a successful community and economic development program. The Tioga County Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Zone came into existence in March 1999 when Hinchey, USDA's Undersecretary for Rural Development, and the chairman of the Tioga County Legislature signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

"The REAP Zone represents a new way of approaching community development," said Hinchey. "Rather than dictating to the community from the federal level, this program allows the direction for development to come from the grass roots level and provides the tools needed to accomplish the community's goals."

Tioga County was only the fourth area in the country to receive the REAP Zone designation. REAP Zone's are given technical assistance in developing a ten-year strategic plan. Upon completion of the plan, REAP-endorsed projects are then given extra points when competing for grants administered by Rural Development.

"The discretionary points are a nice bonus for the REAP zone," Hinchey added. "But the most important benefit of the designation is the technical assistance and the motivation that has been provided. The Tioga REAP has given birth to several projects that haven't even involved USDA funding programs."

Since the MOU signing in 1999, REAP-"benchmarked" initiatives have brought in \$12.3 million for projects in Tioga County. Sources of funding have included State and local government, foundations and the private sector. Most of the funding has come from federal sources, including:

- \$3,776,000 from USDA for sewer and water infrastructure in Barton.
- \$600,000 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for a mobile dental clinic.
- \$100,326 from USDA for a small business revolving loan fund
- \$150,000 from an earmark Hinchey placed in a spending bill to provide a full time REAP Executive Director.
- \$77,500 from the Army Corps of Engineers to help fix the long-standing flooding problems of Dry Brook Creek in Waverly.

Tioga Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP) Zone Highlights of Three Years of Success, 1999 - 2002

The Tioga County REAP Zone was designated in 1999 to help rural communities establish a strategic plan for long-term development and provide hands-on assistance to help turn around local economies. The REAP Zone takes a holistic approach to economic development by bringing local officials together with the business community, education and health professionals, non-profit organizations and community activists. The Tioga REAP Zone initiative and three other USDA-designated REAP Zones are serving as models for flexible rural development in communities around the country.

The REAP Zone designation also entitles Tioga County communities to preference points on competitive federal grants for projects that help fulfill the REAP Zone's strategic plan. To date, the REAP Zone designation has resulted in more than \$12.3 million in federal funding for initiatives in the county.

- January 1999:** Congressman Maurice Hinchey negotiated an agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Development agency to create two REAP Zones in upstate New York -- the Tioga REAP Zone and the Sullivan/Wawarsing Zone. These zones were among only four in the nation designated by USDA for their pilot project on economic development.
- March 1999:** USDA Undersecretary for Rural Development Jill Long Thompson signed a memorandum of understanding with Hinchey and community leaders to establish the REAP Zone. USDA agreed to provide \$25,000 for strategic planning purposes. A board of directors, comprised of representatives of every municipality in the community as well as those with specialties in areas such as emergency response, flooding, education and youth services, was formed. The REAP Board, currently nineteen members strong, has met on a month basis since 1999.
- August 1999:** The Tioga REAP Zone completed its ten-year strategic plan to guide community development. Funded by USDA's initial \$25,000 in seed money, the plan included a mission statement and needs assessment for every community in the county, and it remains the guiding document of the REAP Zone. It was based on information gathered at more than a dozen community meeting held throughout the county. The strategic plan is a living document that can be amended as additional citizen input is gathered.
- September 1999:** Hinchey secured a \$1 million earmark for the nation's four REAP Zones as part of the Rural Business Opportunities Grant program in Fiscal Year 2000 Agriculture Appropriations bill. Language Hinchey inserted in the bill also ensured that the REAP Zones would be eligible to compete for more than \$190 million in funding that had been set aside for Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities for rural housing, rural business and rural utility programs.
- February 2000:** USDA set aside \$1 million in its Single Family Housing program for the Tioga and Sullivan/Wawarsing REAP Zones.

- April 2000:** Hinchey announced that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would provide \$323,000 for improvements to the Owego sewage treatment plant as a result of an earmark that he had placed in the FY '02 VA-HUD Appropriations bill.
- May 2000:** USDA's Rural Business Opportunity Grant program awarded a \$300,000 loan to Tioga County for its small business revolving loan program.
- September 2000:** USDA awarded the Village of Owego \$488,000 in grants and loans for water and sewer upgrades through its Water and Wastewater Loan and Grant program.
- October 2000:** At Hinchey's request, the Fiscal Year 2001 Agriculture Appropriations bill set aside \$2 million for REAP Zones in USDA's Rural Business Opportunity Grant programs. The FY '01 bill also included \$62 million in funding set-asides in rural housing, business and utility programs for REAP Zones, Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities.
- November 2000:** In the Fiscal Year 2001 VA-HUD Appropriations bill, Hinchey secured a \$150,000 earmark for the Tioga REAP Zone to allow the Zone's Board of Directors to hire a full-time professional coordinator for the Zone.
- March 2001:** USDA awarded Tioga County a \$102,326 grant to replenish its business revolving loan fund. The grant, through the Rural Business Enterprise Grant program, supplemented a previous loan of \$300,000. The loan fund was able to assist five area businesses, creating 22 new jobs and saving five existing jobs.
- June 2001:** The Town of Barton was awarded \$3.7 million in grants and loans for improvements to its water and sewer systems, helping the town eliminate health hazards and attract new business development.
- September 2001:** Tioga County received a \$600,000 grant through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program for a mobile dental clinic to provide rural parts of the county with access to dental care.
- January 2002:** After more than a year of negotiations, Hinchey convinced the Army Corps of Engineers to provide \$77,000 for a study of Dry Brook Creek and the Waverly Reservoir in the Village of Waverly to minimize flooding in the village.